

HELPING PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON THE CANARY ISLANDS

By Rasa Kabaila

On a recent trip to the Canary Islands I volunteered at a centre that runs programs for people with mental health issues.

The centre, known as 'El Cribó', is based on one of the islands called Lanzarote.

El Cribó's ethos is to provide different occupational workshops that allow clients to develop skills which give them the highest degree of autonomy possible. This also includes normalisation and integration within their social and family context. Based on this ethos these programs have had highly successful therapeutic outcomes.

At El Cribó the aim is to reduce the stigma of mental health issues in the community and promote awareness. El Cribó does this by giving the clients at the centre every opportunity to participate within their local community including many community events, such as the El Cribó band participating in Carnival each year.

El Cribó provides many activities for clients to pick from which are run co-currently every day. A few of the activities that are run include: gardening, floristry, graphic design, conversation group about sexuality and relationships, meal planning and healthy eating group, music group, sports' group, debating group, conversation group about budgeting and cleaning. Numerous excursions include cycling, trips to the beach, fundraiser nights and karaoke and psycho education groups.

Many of the staff have worked at El Cribó for over 10 years and still maintain the same enthusiasm as when they first started. All of the clients who attend the groups have a good rapport with staff and continuously state how helpful El Cribó has

been for them by giving meaning in their life, learning new skills, having routine, motivation, receiving support and feeling like a part of a family.

The people of El Cribó believe it is the day program activities that really help them to stay well and happy, more so than medication and seeing the doctor. While not dismissing the value of health professionals or medicine, it is evident that these kinds of activities are equally as important in

greenhouse group. El Cribó owns a greenhouse where all of the plants and produce are grown by the clients. I helped harvest and prepare organic tea. The tea is offered to the community in return for donations, which creates ongoing and long term rewards for the people of El Cribó.

There are many benefits of gardening for the clients such as giving a sense of responsibility that allows them to be nurturers. Gardening also keeps clients connected to other living things; it is a mindful activity, and it is a form of exercise that releases 'happy hormones'.

Additionally, gardening gives clients a chance to be outdoors and amongst nature and take in some vitamin D from the sun.

Through all the activities that are provided the clients have become proficient in so many ways that have helped them grow, practically and creatively.


But without a doubt El Cribó would benefit from more funding as public resources are scarce and many expenses are not included in the subsidies.

More money is needed to help clients with greater needs, to improve program functionality and improve the decor, such as furniture – the chairs are very deteriorated. El Cribó could also be better equipped with a small kitchen and some of the computers also need updating.

I've felt so honoured to be

part of El Cribó; it's such a wonderful place. If you would like to donate to El Cribó or volunteer, please contact the ANMJ for my details to discuss opportunities.

For more information about El Cribó go to: <http://elcribo.org/>

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Artwork at El Cribó



mental health recovery.

One of the activities I sat in on was a graphic design class where the clients were learning detailed orientation and map making. Previous students' work in the class included computer designed Christmas cards and self-portraits.

While I was there to help facilitate the group, the clients were helping me by teaching graphic design skills.

My favourite group was the garden/